THE

SUSTENTATION

OF

THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE SYNOD

OF THE

FREE CHURCH OF NOVA-SCOTIA,

AT HALIFAX, JUNE 25TH, 1851.

BY

THE REV. ALEXANDER FORRESTER.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE SYNOD.

HALIFAX, NOVA-SCOTIA:
PRINTED BY JAMES BARNES, 170 HOLLIS STREET.
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A SERMON.

1 CORINTHIANS ix. 14.—"*Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*"

WHAT a pattern of self-denial and devotedness to God was Paul!—His whole soul burned with zeal for the honour of that Saviour he once despised and scorned, but now adored and loved,—for the extension of that cause he was, at one time, so eagerly bent on uprooting; and, for the accomplishment of these purposes, he was willing to endure every toil, to encounter every difficulty, and to submit to every sacrifice. Now, it so happened, as it has done with too many faithful Ministers, in every age, that Paul and Barnabas were, while at Corinth, taunted with the accusation that they had undertaken the office of the Ministry, and were discharging its functions, for no other than filthy lucre's sake. Accordingly we find Paul, with the view of removing any hindrance to the success of the Gospel, which such a charge, however unfounded, might produce, readily submitting to every species of privation, and labouring with his own hands, in order to procure a scanty livelihood. But does he, on that account, hesitate to declare the rights of the Ministers of the Gospel, in the matter of their temporal support, or the duties of those who waited on their ministrations? He betakes himself to the most humble and the most self-denying employments, just that he might occupy higher vantage ground in giving forth the will of God on this important subject—the subject of the Sustentation of the Ministry; and that the Church in coming ages might derive all the more benefit from his instructions.—And hence the value and strength of the argument contained in the preceding part of this chapter, wound up as that argument is by the authoritative statement of out text, "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel."

In directing attention to this passage, we propose to consider, 1st, The Divine appointment in the Sustentation of the Ministers of the Gospel, as herein set forth, viz., "that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." 2nd, The Bible rule laid down for our guidance in carrying out this appointment. 3rd, The duty and privilege of the office

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bearers of the Church on the one hand, and of private Christians, on the other, in connection with this important matter.

I. *The Divine Ordination in the support of a Gospel Ministry.* And in reference to this point, what language could be more explicit or more peremptory than the language before us. Here it is expressly declared that they who dedicate their time and their gifts to the preaching of the Gospel, should obtain their livelihood from their labours. Here professing Christians are not left at liberty to choose whether they shall maintain their own Minister or not, for God has himself, by a positive ordination, settled the matter. But the words of our text form the conclusion of a beautiful and consecutive argument employed by the Apostle in support of his position, and it may not be unprofitable that we advert to the leading features of that argument. It has already been noticed that Paul, in order to remove any ground of offence against his Ministry, worked with his own hands to obtain a livelihood. But whilst he did this, he took proper care to tell the Church at Corinth his reasons for adopting this course—what his own liberty and their duty in the matter, "Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" And having thus introduced his subject, he makes his first appeal to the light of nature, "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" The work of the Minister is here designated a warfare; and just as the soldiers who go forth to battle have a right and title to be maintained by those who enlisted them, so have the Ministers of the Gospel in waging their warfare. And the same reasoning holds good when we farther regard Ministers as husbandmen and as Shepherds.—Having thus shown the reasonableness of the maintenance of Ministers, by those amongst whom they labour, his next appeal is to the law of God "Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law also the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the Ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for Oxen?"—As if he had said, Doth God take more care for Oxen than he doth for ministers or men? He doth take care for Oxen. Then, verily, upon every principle of justice, may it be argued, that He taketh greater care of men, especially such as He employeth in his more immediate service. But the Apostle proceeds in the same strain—"Or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he that ploweth should plow in hope, and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope." And what is the import of this passage? Its import plainly is, that as he who ploweth for another, ploweth

in hope that he will get bread for himself; and as he that thresheth thresheth in hope of the wages for which he agreed; so we who are the Lord's plowmen, labouring together with him for a rich harvest of souls, have every ground to hope for a livelihood from our labours. But the Apostle rises a step higher, and argues, from the excellence and superiority of spiritual things, to those that are carnal, the reasonableness of a competent maintenance for Ministers, seeing that they gave infinitely more than a compensation for all they get. "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we should reap your carnal things?" But lest any should object to this view on the ground that he and Barnabas were not resident Pastors at Corinth, the Apostle shows that even in this case they were not to limit their assistance to those who might be regularly stationed amongst them, but that they ought to extend it to those who, at any time, might have proved useful to them, or to any other portion of the Church of God—"If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power, but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ." But the Apostle rises a step higher still, and makes his last appeal to the expressed mind of God under the Old Testament dispensation. The tribe of Levi, it is well known, was, under that economy, specially set apart to the office of the Ministry. To that tribe there was no inheritance allotted in the land of Canaan. The Lord was to be their inheritance, and accordingly we find that He made provision for a tenth of all being the special property of the Priesthood. And under these circumstances St. Paul puts the question, "Do ye not know that they who minister about holy things live of the things of the temple, and they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" So that they needed not, as other men to labour with their hands to get bread to eat. And now the grand conclusion is drawn. God's will is the same under the New Testament as it was under the Old. The Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church, has appointed a standing Ministry, and has determined that that Ministry shall be maintained by those who wait on it. Accordingly, when in the days of his flesh He sent forth his disciples to preach, 'that the kingdom of heaven was at hand,' he commanded them to provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in their purse, nor scrip for their journey, neither two coats, neither shoes nor yet staves, "for the workman is worthy of his meat," or, as it is in the parallel passage of Luke's Gospel, "for the workman is worthy of his hire." And with what propriety then does the Apostle wind up his argument by saying, "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." We might quote many such passages. We might turn up

the various Epistles, and show you that there is scarcely one in which you will not find these and similar statements. "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth in all good things."—"Now, ye Philippians, know also that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me, as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only." But there is no need of enlarging. Enough has surely been said to satisfy every reasonable man that the support of the Ministers of the Gospel is an ordinance of God, and that for far higher and nobler purposes than the mere preservation of their bodies, or the promotion of the temporal comfort of themselves and families—even for the maintenence and propagation ofthe truth through the entire dedication of all the faculties and energies of their mind, and of all the members of their body, to the cause and service of God. And how admirably fitted is this arrangement to display and illustrate, on the one hand, the Sovereign Proprietorship of God, alike in temporal as in spiritual things, as well as, on the other hand, to cherish and foster a sense of our dependence upon God. And, therefore, it is that those who are faithful and diligent in the discharge of this duty, are represented as honouring God, whilst those who are not, are unhesitatingly pronounced guilty of the flagrant sin of robbing Him. And, still more, how admirably fitted is this arrangement, to serve as an expression or token of our gratitude to God for blessings received, as well as to demonstrate our appreciation of spiritual and divine things; and therefore, it is that Paul, in commending the conduct of the Church at Philippi, for their liberality towards him, with much beauty and significance throws in the clause, "Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." And such being the divine ordination on this important matter, how shall we characterize the conduct of those professing Christians, who look upon it as entirely an optional thing, whether they contribute of their means for the support of the Gospel or not. And still more, how low and mercenary are the notions of those who regard the whole matter of the Sustentation of the Ministry as nothing more than a mere mercantile transaction, a mere pecuniary arrangement, which, if implemented with any thing like exactitude, entitles them to the highest approbation, nay, to be considered as possessed of no ordinary charity and liberality.

II. *The Bible Rule laid down for the practical application of this divine ordinance.*—This is a point that has given rise to no small amount of discussion, and, in not a few cases, to much casuistical perplexity.—There are, indeed, few professing Christians who do not admit it to be their duty to give of their substance unto the Lord, and for the Lord's

cause. But as to the practical application of this duty, as to the measure or proportion of their substance that ought to be devoted to such purposes, the greatest diversity of opinion prevails. There is no definite proportion enjoined either in the Old or New Testament. It is no doubt true, that both under the Patriarchal and Jewish dispensations, a tenth of all was strictly enjoined to be devoted to religious purposes.—But this exact proportion was evidently imposed by reason of the circumstances in which the Church was then placed, and abolished when these circumstances were removed. And are we then really left, without any scriptural rule or guide in this important matter? Quite the reverse. Here, as in other departments of christian obligation, there is a grand leading principle laid down, sufficient for the guidance and direction of any simple-minded and honest-hearted Christian; and that principle plainly is, that every one is to give *according to his ability.*—This was the principle recognised and acted upon in the Old Testament times. At the three annual solemnities of the Jews, for example, when all the males were required to go up to Jerusalem, it was strictly enjoined that none should appear empty. And what was the amount of the offering that was to be cast into the Treasury of the Lord? "Every man," says Moses, "shall give according as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which he hath given thee." The same principle is laid down and enforced in the New Testament. Take a sample—"Upon the first day of the week," saith Paul to the Church at Corinth, "every one of you shall lay by him in store, *as the Lord hath prospered him*, that there be no gatherings when I come." "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not." And more generally, "For I mean not that other men be eased and you burdened, but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance may also be a supply for your want, that there may be equality." Thus, it is clear, there is no prescribed positive proportion of our substance that we are commanded to give unto the Lord, neither a fifth, nor a tenth, nor a fifteenth, nor a twentieth. Each is to give according to his ability, according as the Lord hath prospered him.

And what a glorious principle this! Is not it in full keeping with the whole spirit and genius of Christianity—even the making of the outward conduct the vehicle or the expression of the internal emotion? Is not it illustrative of the righteousness and grace of God, while it constitutes an admirable touchstone for testing the validity of our faith, and the genuineness of our love? Is it not pre-eminently fitted to subserve the interests of Immanuel's kingdom,

whilst it ministers to the purest gratification and the truest blessedness of those who have been experimentally taught the truthfulness of the saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive?" Is it not fitted to advance, in no ordinary degree, the catholicity and the unity of the Christian Church? And oh! the giant power of this principle, when allowed free and unfettered scope. Behold its operation in the erection of the ancient tabernacle! Such was its buoyant success, that Moses required even to restrain the people from bringing more. Behold its influence on occasion of the Pentecostal effusion! "For as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostle's feet, and distribution was made unto every man, according as he had need." Behold its transcendant effects on the Churches of Macedonia! "How that in a great trial of afflictions, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty, that we would receive the gift." Behold its exhibition in more recent times, in the history of the Parent Church, for though it be just about eight years since the Church of Scotland became dis-established, she has had thrown into her treasury during that period, the munificent sum of Two Million Four Hundred and Seventy-five Thousand Pounds, being about a Thousand Pounds every day, and the past year she has raised, for purely Missionary objects, not less than Eight Thousand Pounds more than she has yet done during any year of her existence. And this principle will, we believe, go on, striking its roots yet more deeply, and extending its branches yet more widely, if that Church but knows the day of her merciful visitation, and is faithful in her allegiance to her glorified King. And why but just because it possesses a self-generating, and a self-propagating power. Like the Banana Tree of the East, of which we read so much, it grows but to fasten itself yet more firmly in the soil of the human heart. And what is the effect of the full operation of this principle on the Ministers of the Gospel themselves? Does it minister to their indolence and inactivity, or to their own personal and family aggrandizement? No! No! It but tends to make them more frugal and more economical in their temporal affairs—it but inspires them with greater vigour in the work in which they are engaged, for they too, by the grace of God, have realized the melting and soul subduing influence of this principle, and in its purest gratification they stand prepared to make themselves the servants of all, that they may gain the more,—in its purest gratification they are ready to deny them-

selves every comfort, in order that another standard of the Cross may be uplifted in the regions of spiritual darkness and death—and that the voice even there may erewhile be heard crying out, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth!"

III. But it is time that we now address ourselves *To the duty of office-bearers in connection with this matter, as well as to the duty and privilege of professing Christians.* And here we may premise, that it is much to be feared too many office-bearers, and specially Ministers, betray an over-weening sensitiveness in touching this point, as if it savoured of selfishness or of worldly-mindedness, to make even a passing allusion to it; and what is this but tamely to surrender the functions of their high office to the tastes or prejudices of their hearers;—what is this but to lower the obligations of the support of religious ordinances, or rather, we should say, what is this but to encourage and foster the low and the mercenary views of the office, with which God hath invested them, for the very counteracting of such views, and imparting those of a sounder and more scriptural character. Did Paul, or any of the primitive heralds of the Cross evince any thing of this scrupulosity, of this shrinking timidity? Quite the reverse. There is scarcely an epistle that he wrote to any of the Churches, where the subject is not introduced, either at some length or incidentally. He spurns with indignation, the insinuations and the taunts of those who might misinterpret his motives, and secularize his ends, and he insists upon them all laying liberal things upon the Altar of Christ, which would not only prove a sacrifice of a sweet smell to God, but be an evidence to themselves of the genuineness of their faith, as well as a demonstration to the Church of the self-destroying and world-sacrificing influence of divine grace in the soul. And what was it that rendered the illustrious Chalmers so single-eyed, so confident of success, so unblushingly bare-faced, in pleading this cause—the cause of supporting divine ordinances—introducing, as it were, a new epoch into the whole history of christian liberality? What but these ennobling, these high-toned and lofty views of the grand, the ultimate design of these ordinances, even the extension of evangelical truth to the remotest corners of our globe. Here we cannot refrain from referring to an incident in the life of that great man, strikingly confirmatory of these views, and related with such admirable effect, by Dr. Buchanan, of Glasgow, convener of the Sustentation Fund Committee, in his report of that Fund laid before the recent meeting of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. It so happened that about two months before the Disrup-

tion, he (Dr. Buchanan) and another Gentleman, had occasion to confer with Dr. Chalmers about some other matter connected with the proceedings of that memorable period. It was in his private room in the University. "Fresh from the chair," says Dr. Buchanan in his report, "where he had been delivering one of his noble theological prelections, his very first salutation to us, as he hastily entered the little apartment, was,—"Well, gentlemen, what are you doing about the associations for raising funds?" With feelings, not unnatural, perhaps, in our position, we told him we had taken no part in the forming of such associations at all. We were preparing to relinquish the emoluments of our office, at the call of conscience and of Christ, and we shrunk from even the appearance of busying ourselves about the provision that was to come in their room. Instead of complimenting us on this state of feeling, he had no patience with it, and broke out upon us in a tone of the most vehement expostulation. He would not so much as look at our personal concern in the matter at all. As for our martyr-like spirit, or high Christian chivalry, as we might think it, he treated it without a particle of ceremony. It was standing in the way, not merely of a great future good, but of a present and paramount duty; and this was enough to make it almost odious in his eyes. What was the worth of our testimony for the headship of Christ, and for the spiritual liberties of His Church, if means were not taken to perpetuate it, and to make it serviceable to the great work for which alone the Church of Christ exists?—the work of converting sinners and edifying the saints of God. We were about to renounce the endowments of the State, because we could no longer retain them with a good conscience towards God. But was our Church, for that reason, to abandon its mission?—was it to go tamely to the wall, and to leave Erastianism and Moderatism in the sole possession of the field?—or was it, on the contrary, to become more than ever a great and glorious instrument for diffusing true religion and vital godliness throughout the land and throughout the world? This was the point of view in which that remarkable man contemplated the Sustentation Fund. As for the little delicacies of men's personal feelings, he brushed them aside like so many cobwebs, in prosecuting the grand achievement on which he had set his heart. Like Nehemiah, he was doing a great work; and he could not come down to discuss little questions as to what onlookers might think or say about their motives or designs. That interview made a deep impression on my mind. I felt myself rebuked by the utterance of these noble sentiments."

And now, do you ask, what is the duty of the office-bearers of the Church, Ministers, Elders, and Deacons, in connection with this impor-

tant matter? To this question we reply, 1, They ought strenuously and perseveringly to spare no pains, in public and in private, by their words, and by their example, in enlightening the minds of those over whom the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers, on the solemn obligation of their giving unto the Lord, as the Lord hath prospered them.—Whatever be the charges of worldly-mindedness that may be brought against them in the prosecution of such a work, whatever be the insinuations of selfishness that may be thrown out by not a few professing Christians, when Ministers exhort their flocks to redoubled effort and steady perseverance in such a cause, let them still hold on in the exercise of faith and prayer. Let them ever and anon appeal to the high warrant and authority they possess,—that,in adopting such a course,they are but following out the will and direction of Him, whose are the gold and the silver, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, and who is Head over all to his body the Church. Let them cite the preceptive intimations of God's lively oracles on this subject, and dwell on the high prominence it there holds. Let them point to the conduct of the Apostles, and especially to the Great Apostle of the Gentiles. No one will charge Paul with selfishness, and yet how frequently, and with what earnestness, does he urge the Churches he addressed to a diligent and faithful discharge of their obligation in supporting divine ordinances, as an obligation imposed upon them, not by the will of man, but by the dictate of eternal wisdom and love. Let the office-bearers themselves seek to be more deeply imbued with the spirit of Paul in this matter, and thus, whilst fresh vigour will be infused into their own souls, they will be animated by a more resolute determination to declare the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or forbear.

2nd. The office-bearers of the Church ought to insist upon the benefits that will result from liberality in the support of religious ordinances. It is through these ordinances that we have any warrant to expect the bestowment of the blessings of the Gospel salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ hath instituted these ordinances for this very purpose, and has pledged his faithfulness to render them efficacious. These ordinances are visible, and must be upheld and extended by external and secular means. Upon man has devolved the responsibility of doing all this, by giving of his worldly property; and according to his liberality will these ordinances be maintained and increased. If, then, these ordinances are the divinely constituted channels for the conveyance of heavenly grace, in all its exhilarating influence to the soul, how loud the call addressed to all who have any sense of the value of that grace, to contribute according to their ability, yea, and beyond their

power, for their maintenance and extension. This is the view which the office-bearers of the Church should urge and press upon all. They should expatiate on the rich and satisfying blessings flowing through these ordinances, and labour to show that however important these ordinances may be, they are so chiefly because they are the vehicles of conveying these spiritual blessings. They should enlarge on the glorious effects of these ordinances not only being adequately supported, but extended far and wide—and that those who contribute the smallest mite, with a view to this end, shall receive seven-fold back into their own bosoms, not merely in spiritual, but in temporal things, for the promise in all its extent shall be fulfilled, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

3rd. The office-bearers of the Church ought to devise means for the regular and systematic ingathering of the contributions of the people, and stir up, by every scriptural appliance, the agency that may be employed in this work. Much in this, as in every thing else, depends upon a regular systematic plan of procedure. In times of extraordinary excitement, large sums may be cast into the treasury of the Lord, but the steady and constant maintenance of these ordinances depends upon the smaller contributions of the great bulk of professing Christians, freely and cheerfully given, and for the reception of those contributions some regular systematic method is indispensable. Perhaps the largest and the most regular efforts ever put forth in this way, have been by the Wesleyan Methodists, and the Free Church of Scotland, and yet the great bulk of both these are composed of the middle and lower classes of the community. The grand secret of their success has arisen from all giving something, and giving with cheerfulness; and this according to a systematic plan, thoroughly organized and fully worked. No mercantile establishment can surpass, in order and regularity, the financial operations of the Free Church—whether these relate to the Sustentation of the Ministry, or to her whole Missionary Schemes. The punctuality of the monthly reports of the former fund, for example, from upwards of seven hundred congregations, is truly astonishing, and approximates, as nearly as possible, a state of perfection. All this has been owing to the Bazaleels and Aholiabs that the Head of the Church has raised up for the occasion—men as signalized for their profound practical sagacity, as they have been for their devoted attachment to the cause they had espoused—as energetic in carrying out a plan, as they have been wise in devising it—as expert in the working of the machinery, as they have been in its original adjustment. Now it behoves the office-bearers of every Church to devise and thoroughly to organize the best means, in all the

circumstances, for the regular and systematic ingathering of the contributions of the people, scope being always allowed for the full and free outgoing of Christian principle and love, for the bringing of every man and women, young man and maiden, to realize their own individual responsibility, and to act according to their own conscientious convictions. In the devising of this plan or scheme, much, of course, must depend on the external position and circumstances of the Church, and it is the part of true wisdom for the office-bearers of the Church to accommodate themselves to these circumstances. It is our decided opinion that for the Sustentation of the Ministry, whether we regard the competent support, and comfortable independence of the Ministers on the one hand, or the cherishing of a spirit of catholicity amongst the various congregations on the other, a common central fund, out of which all may receive a proportionate dividend, is the best mode; and that for Missionary objects, congregational associations, when vigorously worked, are more likely to secure a larger revenue than congregational collections. But whatever views may be entertained on these points, that some plan is indispensable, no one will question for a moment. Better, vastly better, some system, however clumsy and unwieldy, than no system at all—provided that system be well worked, be vigorously carried out.—And here an important duty devolves on the office-bearers, and especially on the Elders and Deacons, namely, seeing to it that the collectors and agents of districts, or of a certain number of families, do the work assigned them, regularly and steadily. Attending to this would mightily encourage the collectors themselves, and excite a deeper sympathy in the hearts of office-bearers, on behalf of these Agents, in their arduous and delicate undertaking, as well as serve to show the people that the giving of their substance unto the Lord is not to be regarded in the light of a mere financial affair, but of a sacred obligation, authoritatively imposed upon them by Him whose they are, and from whom they derive their all.

But if the office-bearers of the Church have high and important duties to discharge in this matter, so has the private Christian; and to these we must now briefly advert,

1st, They ought to give to this duty,—the duty of supporting divine ordinances, a priority of claim, in the disposal of their worldly means. Is it not much to be feared that in a great majority of instances, even of those who give with commendable liberality, this is made the last instead of the first subject of consideration in the appropriation of the means that a bountiful Providence hath committed to them. Whatever is required for the supply of their bodily wants, or the temporal comfort and

well-being of themselves and their families, or for their own future worldly plans and projects, is all first and foremost taken out of the Treasury, and expended for each of these objects; and whatever may be the residue or overplus, is then divided or apportioned in the support of divine ordinances, or in the upholding of various schemes of Christian usefulness according to their suppposed value or importance. Now this ought not so to be. Will any professing Christian venture to maintain that the things of the body and of time, are ever, for one moment, to be compared with the things of the soul and eternity? Will notevery reflecting man ... once acquiesce in the declaration of the faithful and true Witness, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul." And if such is the value of the soul, such the magnitude of the things of eternity, then surely the salvation of the soul, and the security of our eternal blessedness, ought to constitute the grand business of life, the paramount subject of concern; and ought to invest the means that God in his wisdom and in his grace has devised, and promised to render efficacious for the accomplishment of these ends, with the most transcendent importance. The institutions of divine grace constitute the means, and these means are extended and upheld by the worldly substance that God has given us; and, therefore, the measure or the proportion of that substance that ought to be dedicated to this purpose, instead of being the last, ought to form the first matter of consideration, that not the mere dregs, but a due measure of the means given us, may be set apart for this object. The Jews were required to give the first of their cattle, of their fruit, of all their substance unto the Lord, and so ought we. Would that such a spirit were poured out upon all ranks of professing Christians! Then would not only all the rest of their stores be blessed, but the windows of heaven would be opened, and such a spiritual blesssing poured out, that there would not be room enough to receive it. Then would there be no lack of means or agency for the evangelization of the world. Then would the fields that are whitening for the harvest, be speedily gathered into the granary-house of Christ.

2nd, But again, professing Christians ought to strive after a greater measure of conscientiousness in the discharge of this duty. Not a few imagine that when they have given all that the office-bearers of the Church demand, when they have paid their pew rents, or the sums that they have subscribed towards the support of the Minister, or when they have equalled in charity and liberality those who hold the same position or status in society with themselves, that they have done all that is required at their hands, yea, that they are entitled to every meed of

commendation. And yet these very individuals may not have contributed at all proportionate to their means, or their ability, either as to what they have received, or as to what they require to expend. The very servants of such individuals may have given vastly more, in proportion to their incomes. What then, do you ask, is the criterion by which they ought to be regulated in the matter of their giving of their substance unto the Lord. Plainly, not the wants and necessities of the case, nor the payment of their just and lawful debts, if the expression may be admitted, nor the full implementing of their sacred engagements. What then? The amount of worldly possessions that the Sovereign Proprietor hath committed to them as stewards. This is what they ought to look at and be guided by. Of course the sum they appropriate to religious purposes out of this, will depend on their state of spirituality; on their sense of obligation to redeeming love; and therefore the propriety, the indispensable necessity, of their making the whole a matter of conscience. And if this were the case, if the rich were to give in proportion to their means, how ample would be the provision for the maintenance of divine ordinances, and how rapidly would they be extended! And would this make any encroachment on their temporal comforts?—Not in the least degree! Their barns would aye be full, and their coffers would be like the woman's pot of oil.

3rd, And finally, they ought to seek to give of their substance unto the Lord, under the conviction that they are thereby called to the exercise of a distinguished privilege. It is, no doubt, as we have shown, a solemn duty laid on all the hearers of the Gospel, to give as the Lord hath prospered them; but it is something more—it is an unspeakable and glorious privilege—a privilege which the loftiest cherub would earnestly covet. And why is it so? Is it because God hath himself written, in letters of gold, "It is more blessed to give than to receive,"—or is it because Christ hath declared, "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." It is a privilege on these grounds, no doubt. But it is so on yet higher and more exalted grounds—because we are thereby using the means that God hath placed within our reach, for the promotion of his glory in the conversion of sinners, and in the edification of saints. Who can calculate the revenue of glory that will redound to all the persons in the Godhead, even from the contribution of the Widow's mite. By the blessing of the Most High, one soul may be

regenerated, and who can calculate the result even of one soul being ransomed from the kingdom of darkness, and introduced into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Who can look forward through the vista of coming ages, and contemplate the effects of the perpetual and ever-encreasing power of moral good, all resulting from this one act of regeneration, which we have been, however unworthy, instrumental in achieving. Let Christians then reflect upon these things—let them seek to breathe in this celestial atmosphere—let them realize the grand end of the mysterious scheme of human redemption—let them habitually feel that they are part and parcel in the accomplishment of this end; not merely the witnesses of God's moral perfections, but the lights of the world, the seed destined to impregnate the whole surrounding mass, with the leaven of immortality, and then will they know it to be a blessed privilege to give according to, yea, and beyond their power. Then will they give, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver, and God will make all grace to abound towards them.

And now, Fathers and Brethren, let me ask, what, after all, constitutes the savour by which the office-bearers of the Church may be salted, and fitted for diffusing throughout the whole body of professing christians that spirit of self-sacrificing liberality, which is never weary of devising and of doing liberal things. What but a deep-rooted, experimental acquaintance with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who tho' rich for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich,—what but our being visited with times of spiritual revival and refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. If the fire of divine life burn low and feeble in our breasts, if we become cold and secular in our spirit and aim, it as Ministers and Elders we cease to watch for souls, as those that must give an account, if our Church becomes indifferent to her great and glorious Mission, then will all go to desolation. But if, on the contrary, the inner life of the Church be strong and vigorous, all will externally bloom and flourish, and bring forth fruit, in some thirty, and in some sixty, and in some a hundred fold. Oh! let us, then, who are commissioned to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, go forth with the faith and devotedness of men who have entered into the bowels and compassion of Christ, and who feel in their own soul the efficacy of the Cross, as the power of God, and the wisdom of God, to their salvation. Oh! let us who are called to rule over the house of God, see to it that we rule well, and thereby be counted worthy of double honour. Then will a fountain be opened up in the hearts of our people, of grace, and love to the Lord that bought them, that will flow forth in perennial streams of genuine liberality to his glorious cause.